

28 January 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence
SUBJECT : SNIE 14-2-69, Confrontation in Korea

1. The draft of SNIE 14-2-69 has been approved by the Board of National Estimates and is scheduled for USIB consideration on 30 January.

2. This SNIE was generated primarily by the fears voiced by General Bonesteel during his Washington visit in November. The two major issues covered were a) the likelihood of North Korean initiating major hostilities or provoking South Korea into initiating them, and b) the comparative strengths of North and South Korean armed forces.

3. There appears to be general agreement that there will be no deliberate attempt by the North Koreans to bring about fullscale hostilities--either directly or through provocation. The possibility remains that warfare might break out as a result of miscalculation of the "pain level" on one side or the other.

4. There is considerable disagreement over the evaluation of the North Korean conventional military forces. OSR's research effort on this problem makes us quite dubious of DIA's position on the strength and size of both the NK ground and air forces. The figures carried in the Annex of the approved draft have been largely supplied by the military services. Analysis now in progress will enable us to begin to correct the situation in a few months. The caveats in the draft enable us to live with the wording for the time being.

5. OSR believes the figure of 350,000 for the North Korean People's Army total manpower probably is too high. The figure is [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] com-
bined with an estimated combat and service support structure. Furthermore, the figure assumes the existence of all units listed in the table of organization, [REDACTED]

Finally, the number represents a 100-percent fill of an inferred order of battle multiplied by a constructed table of organization. We thus think the 350,000 figure presents a "worst case" or fully mobilized picture that should be identified as such. The text describing the manpower figure as one estimated from a "calculated" TO&E is helpful and may well be enough to forewarn the informed reader.

6. This reliance on TO&E estimates is even less satisfactory in the case of the NKPA armor inventory of "some 400 tanks and some 400 assault guns." The DIA inventory from which these numbers were taken is based on a table of equipment and an order of battle that assumes both the existence of the units and their size, despite the fact that less is known of these easily identified units than almost any in the NKPA. Even worse, the inventory lists an antiquated force that was not evaluated on the basis of either capability or the attrition in numbers inevitable for such old equipment. The bulk of these vehicles are listed as T-34 tanks and SU-76 assault guns. The Soviets have not produced SU-76s since 1945, nor T-34s since 1950. Application of CIA attrition rates to this aged force indicates probable loss of approximately one-third of the listed inventory.

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7. The figure of "close to 500" jet fighters in the North Korean Air Force (NKAF) seems inflated, perhaps by as much as a third. [REDACTED]

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Our own initial assessment [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] indicates a total of less than 350 jet

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fighters in the NKAf. [REDACTED]

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8. If the question of the adequacy and accuracy of current estimates of North Korean military strength comes up at USIB, I would support the proposition that a Joint CIA/DIA Study Group on North Korean Forces be established. OSR is, of course, proceeding to develop the analytical work that will be needed whether a joint effort is agreed to or not.

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[REDACTED]
BRUCE C. CLARKE, Jr.
Director
Strategic Research

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